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ABSTRACT

This conceptual analysis discusses how Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" theorizes the transformation of the oppressor. This work has played a major role in the creation, maintenance, and reinvigoration of critical pedagogy. The paper describes Freire's theory for transforming the oppressor and critically assesses his theory. Freire offers a general theory for transforming a somewhat abstract oppressor, thus leaving it up to the reader to decide whether to be the oppressor or the oppressed. To address this issue, the paper examines "Black Feminist Thought" by Patricia Hill Collins for a compatible yet distinct theory of how to engage in critical dialogues given the varied intersectionality of identities. It utilizes Collins' theory to problematize Freire and construct a synthesis called pedagogy of the oppressor (a variant of critical pedagogy that emphasizes the radical task of identifying as the oppressor in order to divest oneself of one's complicity with dehumanization and form solidarity with the relatively oppressed). Both Freire and Collins believe that the knowledge necessary for liberating oppressed-oppressor relationships must come from the oppressed as they speak truth to power. Both retain a sense of the reality of hierarchical power in their dialogical theories, differing in their definitions of the oppressed. (Contains 19 references.) (SM)

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Pedagogy of the Oppressor: What was Freire's Theory for Transforming the Privileged and Powerful?

I first read Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1994. I can remember that I felt like Freire was saying things that I had long felt, although at a somewhat unconscious level. I felt as though Freire gave me a new language for describing the unjustness of society and articulating my desires for better world. Over the next few years, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* became foundational to my views on the relation between teaching, schooling, and social change.

More recently, however, a different memory of my initial reading of the text has emerged in my consciousness. I can also now remember that when I first read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I imagined myself as "the oppressed" within the narrative. As a working-class white student, the first of my family lineage to go to college, I could relate to Freire's ideas about educational hegemony and liberatory desires. But, I nevertheless sensed an interpretive conflict in that I conjured this up in my head, me as the oppressed, even though, deep down, I figured that I was not a member of the oppressed group to whom Freire was referring. Ambivalence ran through my mind in the form of a question: "Am I the oppressed or the oppressor?" I had neither critical awareness nor a depth of

knowledge about such complexities at that time. Having spent the last few years trying to unlearn my oppressive tendencies, particularly around my whiteness, I have decided to revisit *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and examine the theoretical roots of the feelings it stirred in me. This chapter represents that return visit. During this visit, I will delve into Freire's directness and vagueness on the subject of the oppressed-oppressor dynamic. In particular, I will focus on the oppressor aspect of his text since that is the part that I seemed to have completely ignored in 1994.

In addition to my own personal experience, I have come to realize that many other whites read the text and imagine themselves as Freire's oppressed. Having taught the book numerous times and having talked to colleagues who also use the text in their classes, a typical classroom pattern seems to emerge when teaching it in the relatively privileged spaces of U.S. university classrooms. After a week or two of discussion, the class is transformed into a delusional space where everyone is the oppressed and no one is the oppressor. Gone is any sense of the relativity of oppression within globally structured hierarchies. In this "critical" pedagogical milieu, the working-class white male fantasizes himself as being just as oppressed as anyone else. And, if someone tries to challenge his claim, the working-class white male's position is likely to be defended by problematic postmodern statements like "We can't value one form of oppression more than another—oppression is simply oppression."

But oppression is not simply oppression. To make such a claim denies the reality of hierarchies, relationality, and agency that makes differential oppression among multiple identities a social fact. Certainly, no one truly believes that the oppression of Third World women, at the structural level, is the equivalent of the oppression of white workers in the U.S. The difficulty then is not about the lack of knowledge that the white working class has of those who face greater structural oppression. Instead, the problem is more about the white working class, and white middle class, for that matter, not being able to deal positively and critically with their own betwixt and between status. Working-class whites are more likely to accept their status as "the oppressed" relative to the white middle class than they are to accept their status as "the oppressor" of people of color. Various scholars of critical pedagogy have recognized the problem that the multiplicity of hierarchies and identities creates for the formation of dialogical solidarity (Giroux, 1992; Leonardo, 2000; McLaren, 1997). For example, Peter McLaren states:

> Difference is always a product of history, culture, power, and ideology. Differences occur *between* and *among* groups and must be understood in terms of the specificity of their production (1997, p. 126).

McLaren's comments suggest that we need to dig deeper into the concrete identity relationships that are present in our classrooms. We need to understand their spatial and temporal construction and how identities are differentially privileged and disprivileged in the production process. But, critical pedagogy, historically speaking, has tended not to pay direct attention to the concrete specificities of identity, focusing instead on more

abstract notions of theory. In addition, critical pedagogy, which is rooted in the largely Marxist thinking of critical theory, employs a class-first and class-last analysis, more often than not, that acts as a container for race and gender. Neither race nor gender is allowed to hold theoretical dominance over class. This has led some to criticize critical pedagogy for its white and male identity politics (Ellsworth, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1997). Not to mention that it has been strategically and politically limiting in that it has blocked the formation of broad-based solidarity through the stifling of crucial dialogues. Instead, false forms of solidarity have been formed through the repression of further critique, such as on the issue of white supremacy, which were seen by those with relative power and privilege as a threat to solidarity against the outside oppressor, that is, the bourgeoisie, leaving the "oppressor within" unchallenged.

Along a similar line, critical pedagogy is now facing another paradigmatic dilemma. The field of multiculturalism is beginning to turn its gaze, albeit it very slowly, towards the oppressor and (temporarily) away from the oppressed. This turn is a challenge for critical pedagogists because critical pedagogy was established on the premise of privileging the knowledge and desires of oppressed groups in order to enable their empowerment and create social transformation (Freire, 1970/1993). The new political imperative, however, is to foster a sense of radical agency among those representing groups that are the oppressor, including those who are critical pedagogists. For example, critical whiteness studies examines the construction of white racial identity

(Jacobson, 1998; Lipsitz, 1998; McIntosh, 1997; McIntyre, 1997; McLaren, 1997; Roediger, 1999; Tatum, 1997) and the transformation and/or abolition of whiteness as an oppressive social structure (Garvey & Ignatiev, 1997; Giroux, 1997). Pedagogies based on this framework seek to make whites morally and politically accountable for the unearned power and privilege that they receive as members of the white race. In another example, critical masculinity studies employs a similar framework to work against the gendered systems that give men unearned power and privilege (Kimmel, 1987). It seeks to enlist men as active agents who challenge the sexism of other men.

Given these significant and potentially empowering paradigmatic developments, the field of critical pedagogy needs to rethink the problem of social identity. It needs to consider a paradigm of the oppressed-oppressor relationship that is more complex than some vague notion of "the people" versus the bourgeoisie (Freire, 1970/1993) and less reactionary than class-only or class-first/last analyses. In order to construct a new theory of critical pedagogy that takes these considerations to heart, we first need to identify and understand the theory for transforming the oppressor that already exists in critical pedagogy. Therefore, this chapter is a conceptual analysis that discusses how *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* theorizes the transformation of the "oppressor." Freire does not say in explicit terms that he is offering a theory for transforming the oppressor, but it is there. One of the primary goals of this chapter is to bring this theory into relief so that we might examine it and learn from it. Arguably the most famous book on education in the world,

Pedagogy of the Oppressor has played a major part in the creation, maintenance, and, reinvigoration of critical pedagogy over the last several decades. In fact, it is hard to imagine critical pedagogy without the existence of this text. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire writes at length on the different roles to be played by the oppressed and oppressor in the struggle for liberation. However, readers, particularly those that I have encountered, seem to pay little attention to what Freire says about the oppressor and instead limit their focus on what he says about the oppressed. This selectiveness results in what I believe to be problematic and disempowering understandings of Freire's text, especially when the readers have relative social power and privilege, yet wish to see themselves as Freire's oppressed and not as the oppressor. Thus, in the relatively privileged university classrooms of the U.S., much of what Freire says about the oppressor is regularly overlooked as students and teachers turn a blind eye towards any possibility of a critical examination of their own power and privilege.

Once I have spelled out Freire's theory for transforming the oppressor, I will move on to a critical assessment of his theory. As we will see, Freire offers a general theory for transforming a somewhat abstract "oppressor," thus leaving it up to the reader to decide whether to be the oppressor or the oppressed. But, in the real world, this openness of choice can become very problematic, if not just another avenue for those of oppressor groups to reassert their power by claiming to be equally oppressed or even more oppressed than other groups. So, the critical question is "How does one know

when one is the oppressed and when one is the oppressor in a given dialogical relation?" To address this omission in Freire's text, I will turn to what I see as another foundational text, Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought*, for a compatible yet distinct theory of how to engage in critical dialogues given the varied intersectionality of identities, which occur, nonetheless, within social hierarchies. I will utilize Collins' theory to problematize Freire and construct a synthesis that I term a ***pedagogy of the oppressor***, which is a variant of critical pedagogy that emphasizes the radical task of identifying as the oppressor in order to divest oneself of one's complicity with dehumanization and to form solidarity with the relatively oppressed.

Freire's Theory for Transforming the Oppressor

Utilizing a mix of Marxist thought and Christian theology, Freire begins *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by considering the ethical dilemma of taking action against oppression. He argues that the problem of oppression cannot be resolved without also resolving the problem of humanization. In other words, radical ethicists need to consider more than the overthrow of oppression, but also the replacement of oppression with *humanization*, which I take to mean a condition where love, and not violence, reigns. It would be tragic, Freire contends, for the oppressed to simply become like the oppressor in the process of eliminating their oppressive circumstances, for the oppressor is a bad model of what it means to be human. Furthermore, he argues that the oppressed, as a

collective entity, are the only ones who can save humankind because the oppressors are too involved in everyday violence.

> Although the situation of oppression is a dehumanized and dehumanizing totality affecting both the oppressors and those whom they oppress, it is the latter who must, from their stifled humanity, wage for both the struggle for a fuller humanity; the oppressor, who is himself dehumanized because he dehumanizes others, is unable to lead this struggle (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 29).

To avoid modeling the oppressor, the oppressed must act out of *love for*, and not *fear of*, others. The oppressed can restore humanity to the oppressors by combining their "radical love" with collective efforts to usurp the oppressor's power to oppress. Whether through cultural or militaristic revolution, the oppressed show their love to the oppressor by breaking him/her free from his/her self-imposed entrapment in the cycle of dehumanization.[1] Since power is a structural and not an individualistic phenomenon, the oppressed must work for widescale social transformation in order to achieve humanization for all. Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed is a type of self-determination theory whereby the oppressed are to become templates of an integrated humanity as they organize and implement their collective emancipatory power. This philosophy is at the heart of much of critical pedagogy.

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[1] Freire uses only male pronouns in *Pedagogy of the Oppressor*. I am choosing to use both male and female pronouns in my own writing because I wish to reflect the idea that both men and women can be the oppressor. However, I have chosen to put "he" first so as to indicate the males are more likely to be in the oppressor position than females given the global nature of patriarchy.

But outside of the field of vision of many readers, Freire also provides critical educators with a pedagogy for transforming the oppressor. Early on in the text, Freire establishes the primary differences between the oppressed and the oppressor, differences that have important pedagogical implications. One of the major differences is that the oppressor is not oppressed. This seems to be stating the obvious, but it is commonplace to hear folks say that the oppressor is also oppressed by his/her functional role in the system of oppression. Yet, for Freire there is a distinction to be made between oppression and dehumanization; he uses these two terms as a dialectical kinship, not as synonyms.

> Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a *distortion* of the vocation of becoming more fully human (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 26).

To my mind's eye, no where in the text does he explicitly say, or even suggest, that the oppressors are themselves oppressed. However, he does explicitly say that "(a)s the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves become dehumanized" (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 38). Freire seems to suggest that although the daily process of oppression dehumanizes both oppressor and oppressed, it oppresses only the oppressed. The oppressors are dehumanized because their oppressive mentalities prevent them from truly loving the Other. They walk through the world beholden to unfounded fears that they have created for themselves, unable to truly live. This state of unconsciousness about their own dehumanization, however, does not oppress them

because they receive social power and privilege as a result of their dehumanizing efforts. Absent these linguistic distinctions, the signifiers "oppressed" and "oppressor" lose all meaning and become alarmingly conflated. Freire, rather assertively, grounds his theory, and for that matter, most of his scholarly work, in his oppression—humanization dialectic.

Before discussing the process of transforming the oppressor, it is crucial to first grasp the ontological state of being of the oppressor, as described from the vantage point of the oppressed. On this note, Freire articulates in detail many of the most salient characteristics comprising an oppressor identity. Continuing with the theme of de/humanization, Freire contends that oppressors dehumanize Others and themselves by turning the world into a place for the sustainment of their false consciousness. Oppressors accomplish this by defining humanity in their own image.

> Humanity is a "thing," and they possess it as an exclusive right, as inherited property. To the oppressor consciousness, the humanization of the "others," of the people, appears not as the pursuit of full humanity, but as subversion (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 41).

The oppressor's identity becomes synonymous with the word "human." The oppressor does not see, or does not wish to reveal, the cultural particularities of their own state of being. Instead, the subjectivity of the oppressor is presented as a universal standard of what it means to be civil, educated, and human.

Through their inappropriately privileged structural status, oppressors are empowered to construct the world through their violent definition of humanity, which is violent in the sense that it creates the ideological conditions for the dehumanization of Others. Plus, it systematizes the conditions for the social reproduction of oppression by encoding the subjectivity of the oppressors in a way that blinds them to their own violent environment, leaving them comfortably addicted to their situation within it all. For Freire (1970/1993),

> This violence, as a process, is perpetuated from generation to generation of oppressors, who become its heirs and are shaped in its climate. This climate creates in the oppressor a strongly possessive consciousness—possessive of the world and of men and women...The oppressor consciousness tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination. The earth, property, production, the creations of people, people themselves, time—everything is reduced to the status of objects at its disposal (p. 40).

The oppressor's definition of humanity scripts an imperialistic mentality that seeks to position and preserve Others into a denigrated social relation, one that functions to maintain the unjust status and false communing of the oppressor. Freire paints a picture that leads me to imagine the oppressor's state of mind as a form of mental dysfunction, which paradoxically is a necessary psycho-social condition in order for an oppressor to be seen as sane by others in the oppressor group. Freire implies this point when he says, "One of the characteristics of the oppressor consciousness and its necrophilic view of the world is thus sadism" (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 41). The oppressor turns the other into inanimate objects, rendering their death as human subjects and producers of

emancipatory knowledge. Rather than seeking out the life and love to be found in a critical consciousness, oppressors desire the death of truth, and they actively, or even consciously, reproduce this same desire in other oppressors, as well as many of the oppressed.

Given that oppressors have constructed the standards of humanity from their own particularities, oppressors believe that critiques of their so-called standards are threats to civilization itself, such as when neoconservatives like Lynne V. Cheney make the claim that multiculturalism will ruin Western civilization (Giroux, 1992; McLaren, 1997). This phenomenon is particularly evident when the oppressed publicly deconstruct the unearned power and privilege of the oppressed. Rather than believing that what the oppressed are telling them is true, the oppressors instead choose to dismiss the knowledge claims of the oppressed as a means to protect their delusional sense of themselves and the world.

> The oppressors do not perceive their monopoly on *having more* as a privilege which dehumanizes others and themselves. They cannot see that, in the egoistic pursuit of *having* as a possessing class, they suffocate in their own possessions and no longer *are*; they merely *have*. For them, *having more* is an inalienable right, a right they acquired through their own "effort," with their "courage to take risks." (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 41)

In fact, it is safe to say that the oppressors see the condition of their own privilege as evidence of an already existing civilized society. Civilization would not exist, or so the

oppressors' logic goes, were it not for their, or their ancestors', ingenuity, sacrifice, and leadership.

Furthermore, through the moral distortion of their false consciousness, oppressors, without fail, blame the oppressed for their own victimization. Rather than being accountable for the lead role that they play in an oppressive totality, oppressors project their own pathology onto the oppressed. The oppressors' projection lens inverts reality by turning the oppressed into the cause of most, if not all, social ills, thus presenting the oppressors with a slick alibi that slyly diverts suspicion away from themselves. This type of trick photography allows oppressors to beat the rap time and time again. Freire (1970/1993) describes the oppressor's upside-down rationale as follows:

> The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these "incompetent and lazy" folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be "integrated," "incorporated" into the healthy society that they have "forsaken." (p. 55)

Oppressors are able to cement this illusion by constructing myths that plaster over the dehumanizing framework that lies deep within historical and contemporary social relations. The construction of powerful myths is a crucial feature for establishing a system of oppression for they not only act to confuse the oppressed but also the oppressor, although in different ways. In other words, the oppressors' myths function as a means of hegemonic psychological control. The oppressed are more likely to see and

experience the contradictions of dominant myths. However, the myths have a built in safety mechanism in that they function as a surveillor of counter-hegemonic knowledge claims. Invested in their myths and backed by institutional and ideological authority, oppressors establish a normative order to truth telling and sense making that excludes the oppressed to the point of making those who speak out appear as if they are irrational or emotional.

> The desire for conquest (or rather the necessity of conquest) is at all times present in antidialogical action. To this end, the oppressors attempt to destroy in the oppressed their quality as "considerers" of the world. Since the oppressors cannot totally achieve this destruction, they must *mythicize* the world (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 121).

Freire states that many of the most damaging myths are distortions of the seemingly democratic ideas of a free society, an open job market, and the respect for human rights. These democratic ideals become twisted into damaging myths when oppressors act as if these conditions have already been achieved, and not as if they are desired goals yet to be attained in the name of social justice. Oppressors will even include themselves as the primary agents of democratic change within these mythological narratives.

All of this projection of blame and creation of myth has psychological consequences for the oppressor. For example, projection and diversion manifests itself in the oppressor as guilt. At deep levels in the oppressor's psyche, he/she represses that which he/she really knows—that the world is unjust, that he/she receives unearned benefits, that he/she plays an active role in oppression by not doing anything to change it.

But rather than dealing with these repressed emotions in positive and radical ways, oppressors often resort to resolving their guilt through acts of generosity, which Freire sees as merely alibis for further dehumanization.

> In order to have the continued opportunity to express their "generosity," the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this "generosity," which is nourished by death, despair, and poverty. That is why the dispensers of false generosity become desperate at the slightest threat to its source (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 26).

I take Freire to mean that the oppressor needs to do more than the occasional act of so-called "kindness." Instead, he/she needs to devote his/her efforts to the abolishment of the system of oppression that privileges the oppressor as the one who is in a position to be "generous."

However, moving oppressors toward a critical consciousness is a difficult pedagogical task since oppressors will unify to eliminate challenges to their position in the world. In the classroom or other educational contexts, this behavior of oppressors seeks to stifle discourses that have the potential to release them from their dehumanizing status. The newly initiated critical educator or cultural worker who has taken up the task of transforming the oppressor quickly learns of the strong kinship among those in the oppressor group, a kinship that previously may not have been apparent.

> The only harmony which is viable and demonstrable is that found among the oppressors themselves. Although they may diverge and upon occasion even clash over group interests, they unite immediately at a threat to the class (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 125).

As Freire indicates, harmony among the oppressed is less earnest than among the oppressor. This difference in affect is the result of several factors, one of which being the divide and conquer strategy of the oppressor. Whether consciously or not, the oppressor actively works on a daily basis to "weaken the oppressed still further, to isolate them, to create and deepen rifts among them" (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 122). In short, oppressors are much more deeply invested in their identities than we may realize. They grip with tight fists and sweaty palms the discursive facades that mask their guilt and veil their attempts to remain content about a world that they know is warped. Not surprisingly, then, critical dialogical encounters with oppressors are more likely to be emotional rather than rational affairs.

Nevertheless, Freire seems to remain very hopeful that oppressors can be transformed. In fact, his theory of liberation is in part based on the assumption that the oppressor can be liberated and humanized by the radical love of the oppressed. Moreover, the humanization of the oppressor is essential for the fulfillment of a utopian social transformation that is truly anti-oppressive, as all humans, not just the oppressed, are included within Freire's vision. But despite the great hopefulness exhibited by his inclusion of the oppressor in his plan, he certainly does not seem naïve about the tremendous difficulty of transforming the oppressor. Capturing the high degree of change needed for an oppressor to be in actual solidarity with the oppressed, Freire (1970/1993) proclaims, "Conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth" (p. 43).

Thus, Freire posits an identity transformation process that is less about pedagogical methods and more about moral, ethical, and political hurdles in the developmental progress toward establishing radical alliances. Prior to rebirth, oppressors deny that they are the oppressors. They may acknowledge that oppression exists or that they are members of a privileged group, but that is not the same thing as taking ownership of the signifier "oppressor." As Freire (1970/1993) says, "Class conflict is another concept which upsets the oppressors, since they do not wish to consider themselves an oppressive class" (p. 124). The implication is that the first step is for the oppressor to accept that they are in fact the oppressor. In other words, it is not that the oppressor does not see class conflict, but that he/she does not want to accept his/her own role in it. Freire cautions, however, that this first step is far from an endpoint, for oppressors who accept their oppressor identity can still act as oppressors.

> Discovering himself to be an oppressor may cause considerable anguish, but it does not necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed (p. 31).

Words ring hollow for Freire if not accompanied by new ways of living, acting, and thinking in the world. A long path of un/learning awaits the oppressor who truly wishes to gain the trust of the oppressed.

The process of rebirth is based upon the achievement of solidarity with the oppressed. Achieving solidarity requires that oppressors must *tangibly* demonstrate their solidarity with the oppressed. For Freire, it is the achievement of solidarity that validates

the true transformation of the oppressor. Anything short of true solidarity marks the oppressor as still being invested in old ways, and old identities. The oppressor's transformation cannot then be evaluated by the oppressor himself/herself, but by the oppressed who are themselves decolonized. One obstacle to the achievement of solidarity is that oppressors enter the process of humanization with denigrating and distorted myths about the oppressed. Freire (1970/1993) states that the oppressors who join with the oppressed "almost always bring with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations, which include a lack of confidence in the people's ability to think, to want, and to know" (p. 42). As beings whose consciousnesses have been encrypted by their experiential position of power and privilege, oppressors must learn how their group has traumatized the oppressed and how this has shaped their own problematic sense of self and Other.[2] The oppressor must go through an extensive educational process of deconstructing these dehumanizing myths and learning to see the world anew through a "critical consciousness." The oppressor must become awake to the realities of oppression, their functional role within it, and the falsehood of their prior sense of self.

[2] I would also add that the oppressor needs to learn how the oppressed have resisted against and coped with the system of oppression.

The gaining of a critical consciousness must correspond to a new forms of behavior and action that clearly demonstrate love for the oppressed, a love that is actually felt by the oppressed. As Freire (1970/1993) urges,

> The oppressor is solidary with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor—when he stops making pious, sentimental, and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love...To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce (pp. 31-32).

This is the beginning of critical consciousness for the oppressor when he/she starts to actually believe the knowledge claims of the oppressed and decides to become politically and morally aligned with them. Freire (1970/1993) suggests that for the oppressor to demonstrate their solidarity they must become active agents who work against the structure of oppression and risk retaliation from other members of the oppressor group, rather than continuing to passively receive the benefits and comforts of privilege.

> Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture. If what characterizes the oppressed is their subordination to the consciousness of the master, as Hegel affirms, true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these "beings for another." (p. 31)

By using the term "situation," I take Freire to mean that the oppressor must place him/herself as one who opposes the system of oppression.[3] This move locates the reborn oppressor into an agent against the ideological and material dominance of his/her own group.[4] In a word, the oppressor must become a "traitor" to his/her identity group in order to move towards humanization. In this phase of rebirth, the oppressor is actively engaged in struggle and his/her presence is welcomed by the oppressed, or as Freire says above, the oppressor is "fighting at their side." I infer from Freire's words that an oppressor who claims to be on the side of the oppressed, but is not actually welcomed by the oppressed, has not had a rebirth of consciousness.

An oppressor who is not welcomed by the oppressed, at a group level, even as he/she claims to be fighting for the oppressed is merely practicing a form of paternalism born out of disbelief in the oppressed. This leads to another pedagogical concern for the rebirth of the oppressor. Oppressors who have been reborn must have trust in the oppressed.

> A real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favor without that trust (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 42).

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[3] One of the signs of privilege for the oppressor is that he/she can choose to place himself/herself against oppression. And, this is something that the reborn oppressor must always be cognizant of. The oppressed cannot make such a choice due to how their social identities situate them in the larger system.

[4] I will continue to use the term "oppressor" to describe the person or persons who have been transformed. Those of the oppressor group will always be the oppressor until the oppressor group no longer exists as a functional and hierarchical state of being. I will, however, use the term "reborn oppressor" to indicate the difference between those who have achieved or are truly attempting to achieve solidarity with the oppressed and those who are still unconscious to their oppressor identity.

The message here is clear: the oppressor should be willing to follow the lead established by the oppressed since it was their knowledge and love that actually liberated the oppressor. Oppressors, due to their relative power and privilege, can oftentimes gain a leadership role, and often do so because they have learned that this is what one does as a form of entitlement. However, oppressors have the least to lose if the struggle fails, thus they should demonstrate their trust in the leadership of the oppressed, as it is the oppressed who have the most to lose. As an aside to this examination of Freire's text, I have noticed that this lack of trust in the oppressed is often present among some critical pedagogists who come from oppressor groups. Unfortunately, they tend to be too quick to invoke the concept of hegemony as a means of explaining away their own ideological conflicts with the oppressed. For example, I have heard numerous white criticalists dismiss the race-focus of people of color. The white criticalist in this scenario believes that capitalist hegemony creates a type of false consciousness among people of color that is race-focused and class-blind. In other words, people of color are being blamed for the lack of unity necessary for the white criticalist's vision of a global proletariat revolt. Freire's words indicate to me that white criticalists ought to demonstrate their trust of people of color by engaging in their struggle against white supremacy, and doing it vigorously and whole-heartedly before one is in a position to question the class consciousness of people of color. Besides, no group has assimilated more to capitalism

than white folks. Moreover, people of color are the least assimilated to capitalism, and may be more against economic injustice than the white criticalist thinks. Thus, the high level of scrutiny placed on people of color by some white criticalists is cause for concern. "Trust" means that the oppressor believes in, not blindly, but situationally and strategically, the ontology, epistemology, and axiology of the oppressed.

The process of rebirth for the oppressor does not stop here. There are on-going moral and ethical issues that must continually be addressed since, after all, the oppressor does not stop being a member of the oppressor group simply because they have been reborn to the oppressed. Social identities are structural features and one can only leave the implications of group membership when the structures themselves are transformed. In the meantime, privileges and disprivileges are still incurred depending on how one is socially identified as a member of the oppressor or oppressed group. For Freire, the process of being reborn is a perpetual attempt to become more fully human in a system that prematurely identifies members of the oppressor group as already human. In order for the oppressor to continue to become human, Freire (1970/1993) suggests that they must gain consistency in their disdain for oppression and love of humanity when he says,

> Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly. This conversion is so radical as not to allow of ambiguous behavior. To affirm this commitment but to consider oneself the proprietor of revolutionary wisdom—which must then be given to (or imposed on) the people—is to retain the old ways. The man or woman who proclaims devotion to the cause of liberation yet is unable to enter into *communion* with the people,

> whom he or she continues to regard as totally ignorant, is grievously self-deceived (p. 43).

Oppressors can only grow as radicals through close moral, spiritual, and ideological comradeship with the oppressed. And, as Freire indicates, self-reflexive examination is never ending, for the oppressor is always "at risk" of falling back into the normative ways of the oppressor group. Since the oppressor exists in a world that privileges the oppressor identity, even reborn oppressors will continue to experience the world as the oppressor in various moments. This differential experience constructs blindspots in the oppressor's consciousness that will need further transformation. Through educational dialogues with the more decolonized of the oppressed, or even other reborn oppressors who are more experienced, a critical pedagogy can play a major role in liberatory struggles for humanization.

Although the oppressor can be transformed through critical dialogue with the oppressed, we must be more specific about the dynamics of this type of intercultural communication, particularly as it occurs in educational settings. Cross-cultural dialogue between oppressor and oppressed is extremely difficult since the oppressor's voice sounds out as the standard of sonic normalcy and cognitive rationality, when in fact it is actually marked through and through with privileged positionality and unwarranted social entitlement. Moreover, the oppressor has learned to rely upon various mythologies to hide this fact and shield its outing from all comers. Oppressors are not used to dealing

with dialogues where their power, privilege, and subjectivity is the main topic of conversation, and if any of them are used to it they still tend not to deal very positively with the situation. Freire's theory for transforming the oppressor calls for a pedagogy that fully accounts for the differentness of the oppressor in socially discursive settings. Rather than theorizing and treating the oppressor as a universal being and a generalized student, dialogical participants from oppressor groups must be situated within a theory for transforming the oppressor as the classroom is itself a political stronghold vital to the reproduction of dehumanization and oppressor privilege. Thus, as such, the classroom must be seen as a political space where the transformation of the oppressor can occur through a process of radical love and revolutionary knowledge construction. Instead of rejecting scientific knowledge, as do too many postmodernists, Freire still sees critical and democratic possibilities for structural depictions of reality within oppressive regimes. He even suggests, once again to the chagrin of postmodernists, that "authority" is an acceptable condition of revolutionary pedagogy.

> In this process [of dialogue], arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be *on the side of* freedom, not *against it*. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 61).

Given his belief that it is only the oppressed and their knowledge that can liberate the oppressor, we can assume that the authority that he speaks of is the moral and political authority embodied by those of the oppressed who are pursuing humanization for all. Furthermore, Freire (1970/1993) indicates that this knowledge is not simply an

anarchistic form of poststructuralism, but strategically and radically structural when he says,

> The inhumanity of the oppressors and revolutionary humanism both make use of science. But science and technology at the service of the former are used to reduce the oppressed to the status of "things"; at the service of the latter, they are used to promote humanization. The oppressed must become Subjects of the latter process, however, lest they continue to be seen as mere objects of scientific interest (p. 114).

The oppressed must become the authors of a type of science that takes the problem of oppression as its central concern and moves humankind towards liberation (see Harding, 1991). Science that promotes humanization must transform the empirical knowledge of the oppressed into a structural understanding of their situation. Revolutionary leaders, whether in the community or classroom, must move beyond rhetoric and shape an informed and critical discourse of the causes of oppressive circumstances through "the people's empirical knowledge of reality" (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 115). This more revolutionary form of scientific knowledge, and its associated wisdoms, would then stand as the conceptual basis of a critical curriculum for the transformation of the oppressor.

Yet, little transformation can occur within a classroom if the oppressor is still trapped within a mentality that sees knowledge associated with the oppressed as being distorted or full of blindnesses. Humanizing dialogue between the oppressed and the oppressor cannot occur without the humility of the oppressor. Without humility, the oppressor is doomed to remain in their dehumanizing and dehumanized state. For the

oppressor to be committed to humanization, he/she must support the oppressed in their naming of the oppressor and the system of oppression.

> Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them. Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 69).

So, in classrooms, oppressors typically argue with the oppressed, mostly for fear of being called out as "the oppressor," thus stifling critical dialogue. Rather than accepting their oppressor identity, their possessive investment in their own status creates communicative barriers and obstacles to solidarity. This behavior can even occur among those of the oppressor group who consider themselves to be "radicals." For example, oppressor group members who focus more on the colonized mentality of the oppressed than on their own colonizing mentality as well as that of their oppressor group lack the humility necessary for humanizing dialogue. Sure, it is true that hegemony operates in such a way that many of the oppressed deserve scrutiny for being complicitous with the oppressive system. However, the oppressors are primarily responsible for oppression and thus deserve the *greater scrutiny*, particularly from those "scrutinizers" who are also of the oppressor group.

> Dialogue, as the encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility. How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I

> dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from others—mere "its" in whom I cannot recognize other "I"s? (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 71)

Freire is speaking here about both the oppressed and the oppressor. And, certainly it is sometimes the oppressed who can lack humility. However, the more typical and destructive scenario is for the oppressor to be the one who denies, dismisses, denigrates, and belittles the oppressed in dialogue. The oppressor will resist scrutiny of the oppressor group by shifting the dialogue back to an examination of the oppressed group so as to avoid being the object of study.

Additionally, the process of humanizing oppressors through dialogue requires the organization of pedagogical practices that counter their attempts to restore their oppressive regime within the educational setting. As previously mentioned, oppressors are adept at ordering the world into places for the sustainment of their false consciousnesses. This includes the space of the classroom. The critical educator can assume that those from oppressor groups will not readily divest themselves of their views of themselves and Others. Therefore, more assertive and strategic measures must be taken when challenging the ideologies of oppressors in classrooms. For many criticalists, this goes against what they have been taught about the positivity of "open" dialogue. But one must realize that the pedagogical need to empower the voices of the oppressed is not at odds with, but correlated to the need to transform the voices of the oppressor. Dialogue is never truly open, and is certainly less open when the oppressors continue to

perpetrate their dehumanization during intercultural communication. Even Freire (1970/1993) himself demonstrates his belief that dialogue should not be an "anything goes" affair when he states:

> ...[T]he restraints imposed by the former oppressed on their oppressors, so that the latter cannot reassume their former position, do not constitute *oppression*. An act is oppressive only when it prevents people from being more fully human. Accordingly, these necessary restraints do not *in themselves* signify that yesterday's oppressed have become today's oppressors. Acts which prevent the restoration of the oppressive regime cannot be compared with those by which a few men and women deny the majority their right to be human (p. 38-39).

Humanization requires a praxis that does not allow the oppressors to perpetuate their system of oppression, while at the same time effectively transforming their consciousness. Pedagogical strategies that are meant to create a sense of dissonance for the oppressor are crucial to his/her rebirth, and must be a considered and institutionally supported mode of instruction because oppressors will attempt to avoid such disorienting tactics. Plus, the use of a problem-posing education can create for the oppressor a critical consciousness for solidarity with the oppressed and agency against the dehumanization caused by the oppressor's own group. Problem-posing education consists of a "constant unveiling of reality" that "strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality" (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 62).

Freire's theory for transforming the oppressor must be more central to any reading of his text, particularly in the relatively privileged global spaces of U.S. university classrooms. It is a difficult task to be reborn to the oppressed, and critical

pedagogy, as a political and educational project, needs to do more work in this area. Without a theory for transforming the oppressor, the critical pedagogist runs the risk of coddling the oppressive mentalities of students by treating them like the oppressed. Another risk is that the critical pedagogist will simply chase off resistant oppressors, leaving them unchanged and still perpetrating their dehumanizing tendencies against the oppressed. Since both the oppressed and the reborn of the oppressors have to deal with the unchanged oppressor on an everyday basis, it is our moral and political obligation to attempt to change the oppressor. The practice of this moral and political obligation is especially crucial for the on-going rebirth of the transformed oppressor because he/she needs to be accountable for the consequences manifested by their own cultural group. Contrary to what some may believe, Freire also does not seem to believe in the dialogical wallowing of postmodern relativism, where identities are slippery and hard to define or name. When looked at from the view of his theory for transforming the oppressor, he is quite assertive in describing the depth of change that is needed and the types of pedagogical and dialogical strategies necessary to intervene in the dehumanizing tendencies of the oppressor. His theory reminds us that a change of consciousness for those of the oppressor group only comes through conflict, content, and possibility.

However, Freire's theorization of the oppressor does have a major shortcoming that must not be buried and silenced. His theory gives little if no guidance to the reader as to how to decide when a person is the oppressed or the oppressor. Instead, he offers a

vague emphasis on the binary of "oppressed" and "oppressor" that seems to assume that the reader readily understands whom he is referring to. Oftentimes, he refers to the oppressed as "the people," an open-ended term that could allow just about anyone to imagine themselves as an included member. My sense, though, is that Freire had a more specific and exclusive group in mind. His Marxist and humanistic beliefs leads me to believe that "the people," and thus, "the oppressed," translates into "the proletariat" while "the oppressor" translates into "the bourgeoisie." However, Freire does not explicitly make this translation, so it is difficult to determine whether this is in fact what he had in mind. It is curious to me that he used these rather abstract and generalized terms since *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was shaped largely by his work with the people of Northeast Brazil, who are largely the ancestors of enslaved Africans. Given that Freire was a white man, it seems highly problematic that he chose to reference class exclusively with little or no mention of race. Moreover, his theory offers no framework for dealing with the intersecting oppressions of white supremacy, patriarchy, heterosexism, and capitalism that exist in the real world. In other words, there is little in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that helps us deal with the dialogical tensions created when a group, and thus its members, is the oppressed relative to some groups and the oppressor relative to Others. For instance, working-class whites are oppressed by capitalism but are privileged by white supremacy. Are they Freire's "oppressed" or are they the "oppressor"? And, how should we decide? In short, Freire's monolithic signifiers of "the oppressed" and "the

oppressor" need to be further theorized for their actual complexities. Without this further theorization, critical dialogical encounters that are intended to create solidarity will ultimately serve the divide and conquer interests of oppression because they will publicly silence Othered oppressions. What is needed is a theory of dialogue and solidarity that takes the best of Freire's theory for transforming the oppressor while accounting for the intersectionalities of oppressions. And, this theory must be more than a reactionary "can't everyone just get along" rhetoric or a postmodern "all oppressions are equal" abstractionism. The theory should be grounded in structural theories that promote democratic action against oppressive totalities and maintain the utopian sense of a humanized possibility (Giroux, 1992; McLaren, 1997).

Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* provides such a theory. What Freire's theory of transforming the oppressor lacks is what Collins' theory of intersectionality within the matrix of domination adds, that is, a theory for deciding when one is the oppressed and when one is the oppressor. Collins applies a more sociological rubric, rooted in the identity specific realities of socially structured and hierarchical oppression, that takes much of the postmodern choice factor out of the oppressed-oppressor equation. After all, identities are, in reality, less about personal choice or fashion than they are about socially structured relationships of power and signification. Let's take a closer look at the theory of Collins so as to sympathetically critique and renew Freire's theory of transforming the oppressor.

Antithesis: Collins' Theory of Intersectionality within Matrix of Domination

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins theorizes the shifting nature of oppressor-oppressed identity. Like Freire, her work is also grounded in a radically democratic quest for the end of oppression, full humanization for all, and the immediate necessity of building solidarity. Unlike Freire, however, her quest is broadened to account for the multiplicity and complexity of oppression across various systems. Collins (2000) contends that the identity of humans is not fixed as either the oppressor or oppressed because our identities morph as we come into relation with various Others across time and space. That is to say, in some contexts we are the oppressor and in other contexts we are the oppressed.

But, exactly how does one know when one is the oppressed and when one is the oppressor? Although oppressor-oppressed identities do shift, they still remain within a hierarchical structure, or the matrix of domination, which creates a social experience that is highly predictable across multiple instantiations of time and space. Given her emphasis on critical dialogue and alliance building, Collins suggests that the decision as to whether one is the oppressed or oppressor should be based upon the relationship of domination that is represented in the dialogue at hand.

> Intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice. In

> contrast, the matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are actually organized. Regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression (Collins, 2000, p. 18).

Collins implies that oppression is not relative, but is structured even when speaking of intersections. On this more structural level, within- and between-group oppression can in fact be weighed in terms of relative power and privilege. Although being "called out" as an oppressor may cause tension and anger among those who are members of what are typically seen as historically oppressed groups, Collins contends that ignoring the realities of oppression in favor of essentialist unity ultimately thwarts democracy. In Freire's theory, the oppressor defines "human" in his/her own image. In Collins' theory, the oppressor might not be a white Western male, and cannot control the definition of "human." However, the oppressor may be able to somewhat control what counts as proper "Black," "feminist," or "proletariat" subjectivity. For example, she argues that the Black struggle against white supremacy is no reason for Blacks, whether men or women, to be silent about the oppression Black women experience due to Black patriarchy (Collins, 2000). In this example, Black men are cast as having structural advantages over Black women, even though they are oppressed vis-à-vis white supremacy. Collins (2000) seems to be quite aware of the difficulties of radical dialogues between groups such as Black men and Black women when she says,

> By advocating, refining, and disseminating Black feminist thought, individuals from other groups who are engaged in similar social justice projects—Black men,

> African women, White men, Latinas, White women, and members of other U.S. racial/ethnic groups, for example—can identify points of connection that further social justice projects. Very often, however, engaging in the type of coalition envisioned here requires that individuals become "traitors" to the privileges that their race, class, gender, sexuality, or citizenship status provide them (p. 37).

In other words, Black men need to work with Black women in order to divest themselves of Black patriarchal systems, that is, they need to become traitors to Black patriarchy. Likewise, Latinas need to work with Black and indigenous women to divest themselves of their relative color privilege. And, U.S. Black women must work with Third World Black women in order to divest themselves of their first world privilege. Overall, one who is radically democratic, or as Cornel West says, a "radical democrat" (1999), must show ideological consistency by accepting the oppressor identity when one is representing a state of being with more structural power that the Others in the dialogue. Collins does see larger totalities at work, but she also sees multiple yet interconnected layers in the hierarchy, or the matrix of domination, and is asking us to take responsibility for our structural situation within it, even if we are not located on the very top.

This framework should also shape the nature of the dialogical process of transforming the oppressor. For example, white women, as a group, have more structural power than Black women do. Collins notes how white women employ structural advantage over Black women in terms of economic status, racial privilege, cultural capital, and sexual power. Blinded by the epistemological distortion of their relative

oppressor status, white women, as a group, remain consistently oblivious to how constructions of white female beauty place heterosexual Black women at a disadvantage (see Frankenberg, 1994; Sleeter, 1996).

> In this context of what is perceived as widespread rejection by Black men, often in favor of White women, African-American women's relationships with Whites take on a certain intensity. On the one hand, antagonism can characterize relationships between Black and White women, especially those who appear blissfully unaware of the sexual politics that privileges White skin...On the other hand, given the culpability of White men in creating and maintaining these sexual politics, Black women remain reluctant to love White men. Constrained by social norms that deem us unworthy of White men and norms of Black civil society that identify Black women who cross the color line as traitors to the race, many Black women remain alone (Collins, 2000, p. 162).

This and other antagonisms between Black and white women, born out of differing material conditions and epistemological systems, crystallize as cultural and ideological borders in critical dialogues. White women, as the relative oppressor, bear the greater responsibility to listen to and be transformed by the collective experiences and philosophies of Black women. In Freirean terms, white women, as the oppressor, predictably lack humility, more often than not, when dialoguing with Black women and other women of color. The critical learning of such a dialogical encounter should specifically focus on the relationship between white women and Black women while avoiding abstractions that turn attention away from the personal and group responsibilities of white women. Sure, white supremacy, patriarchy, and even capitalism

can be named as determining totalities, but this does not excuse white women from acting as agents of these totalities.

In another example offered by Collins, there are also diverse circumstances of power among Black women since, of course, no group is monolithic.. As opposed to the context of dialogues between white women and Black women, the oppressed-oppressor dynamic shifts when the dialogue for seeking solidarity is among Black women. Since middle-class Black women have social power over working-class Black women, middle-class Black women become the oppressor when they are in dialogue with working-class Black women. In Collins' framework, it is up to middle-class Black women, in this scenario, to listen to and learn from the experiences and knowledge of working-class Black women. The dialogue should focus on the specific ways in which middle-class Black women oppress working-class Black women. Middle-class Black women should reflect upon and critique their ways of knowing that are complicitous with the disempowerment of working-class Black women.

Applying Collins' framework to my concerns about race and class issues between whites and people of color, I offer the following example. Whites, even white Marxists, will exploit the tensions within groups of color to shield themselves from a self-examination of their own oppressive tendencies. Consider the tension between middle- and working-class Blacks. I would say, with the help of Collins, that Black resistance against white supremacy, although tremendously vital and necessary, is no excuse for the

Black middle class to define "Blackness" in a way that hides their structural power/privilege over the Black working class. Economic oppression is very salient in this particular dialogical relationship (between middle- and working-class Blacks), but its specificities are imbedded primarily in middle-class Black's fears of not appearing united against white supremacy. So, in this dialogical relationship, maybe it is important to foreground class, while remembering that it is white supremacy that provides that larger container. Meanwhile, it is also important that white Marxists do not misuse this dialogue among the Black community to distance themselves from their own complicity in white supremacy, after all, it is white supremacy that frames the hesitancy of airing their "dirty laundry" of internal class oppression. Too many white leftists, upon hearing this debate among Blacks, would be quick to say, "See, even they think it's class and not race." Of course, it's always more than one, but the question is which should be foregrounded and when. As Collins suggests, it depends on the specificities of the dialogical participants and the specificities of their larger matrix of domination.

Synthesis: Pedagogy of the Oppressor

Both Freire and Collins believe that the knowledge necessary for liberating oppressed-oppressor relationships needs to come from the oppressed as they speak truth to power. Thus, both retain a sense of the reality of hierarchical power in their dialogical theories. But, as we have seen, the two differ when it comes to defining "the oppressed."

Freire's system is a binary of oppressor and oppressed. Collins' system is intersectional, multi-tiered, and dialogically contextual. Still other differences exist in their plans for transforming the oppressor. Whereas Freire outlines the ethical and pedagogical concerns for the rebirth of the oppressor, Collins instead devotes much more of her text to the very specific and concrete historical and cultural details of a variety of oppressor-oppressed relationships. Thus, Freire provides a general theory to transfer from context to context. Conversely, Collins shows us what the content of an actual critical dialogue might look like, and, in effect, she demonstrates just how important those contextual details are for dealing with real world identities in their particular oppressor-oppressed specificities. For Collins, the nuances of the sociocultural and sociohistorical narratives are critical to transformation. One might say that for Collins "the devil is in the details." In contrast, Freire pays less attention to the details of the dialogue and focuses more on the overall development of the moral and political commitment of the oppressor. His theory can help us evaluate the general dynamics of a critical dialogue between oppressed and oppressor, thus proving the phrase "there's nothing more useful than a good theory."

Through a synthesis of Freire and Collins, I propose a ***pedagogy of the oppressor*** that seeks to deal directly with the problem of the oppressor's mentality, transformed or not, within the doing of critical pedagogy. Borrowing from Freire, a pedagogy of the oppressor begins with the assumption that the oppressor identity is a different kind of

"problem" than that of the oppressed. The consciousness of the oppressor has been shaped by his/her privileged experience in a system of oppression. They are members of a group that creates the social order in their own image, to the extent that that is possible. Their relative power and privilege over the oppressed, and their subsequent denial and perpetration of this power, imposes psychological and material violence upon the oppressed. The relative oppressor will resist any challenges to their misshapen view of themselves and the world, and this reactionary behavior will be most evident in a classroom where truth truly is spoken to power. A pedagogy of the oppressor must be prepared for the oppressor to redirect criticism by blaming the oppressed for their lesser status and power, as the oppressor will surely project their own self-loathing onto the oppressed. Oppressors will also try to mythologize the current reality through twisted and distorted narratives that they have used, usually with predictable "success," to divert the critical gaze in classrooms and dialogues away from themselves and back upon the oppressed. A pedagogy of the oppressor must then take the lessons of Collins to heart. It is not enough to have the general guidelines of a theory for transforming the oppressor; a critical educator also needs to know the specific, detailed critiques of the particular oppressor-oppressed dialogue at hand. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) makes a good point when she says,

> ...[C]ritical pedagogues consistently answer the question of "empowerment for what?" in ahistorical and depoliticized abstractions. These include empowerment for "human betterment," for expanding "the range of possible social identities

> people may become," and "making one's self present as part of a moral and political project that links production of meaning to the possibility for human agency, democratic community, and transformative social action." As a result, student empowerment has been defined in the broadest possible humanist terms, and becomes a "capacity to act effectively" in a way that fails to challenge any identifiable social or political position, institution, or group (p. 307).

The critical educator must be ideologically, conceptually, and rhetorically astute about the specificities of social identities if she/he is to create conditions for the rebirth of the oppressor. To avoid oppressive abstractions, a pedagogy of the oppressor sees no good substitute for a depth of critical multicultural content.

Looking more closely at Collins, her work contributes to a pedagogy of the oppressor both the structure and complexity necessary to deal with multiple systems of oppressed-oppressor relationships in the classroom. She at once embraces the postmodern realm of varied oppressions and intersections, but at the same time places them within the still existing modern world of very real social hierarchies and material and psychological consequences. Collins' theory of intersectionality within the matrix of domination is a complex model for building solidarity that does not steer away from the harder questions about relative privilege and power among groups that are not the elite, but intermediate hegemons. A pedagogy of the oppressor is able to speak to and challenge the multiple layers of oppression without merely shifting wildly and haphazardly from one "ism" to another, landing wherever the relative oppressors feel most comfortable. In terms of a political philosophy, Collins grounds her theory within

the real struggles of building democracy rather than relying upon abstractions of relationships, which only seem to promote hegemony and/or separatism. She seems to resist theorizing the larger framework of domination and oppression separate from the specificities of the dialogical relation; different totalities take center stage as the social identities of the oppressor-oppressed relation change. Collins' theory appears to reject any assertion of totality that does not also name the group-to-group relationship that is being worked upon. Instead, her theory posits humans as socially identifiable agents standing completely within a hierarchical system. And, the only way they can dismantle the system, to achieve full humanity in Freirean terms, is to collapse it like an accordion, not just from the bottom up, but also through the top-down humility and "traitor" agency of the multiple oppressors. Therefore, a pedagogy of the oppressor takes as a central political philosophy that social transformation cannot occur only through bottom up revolutionary strategies. The oppressors, all of the oppressor throughout all of the social strata, need to account for and rebel against their oppressor identity.

A pedagogy of the oppressor, though, does take note that it is certainly different to be an oppressor at the top of the global matrix of domination than towards the bottom. However, if full humanization is the goal, all who are in a relative oppressor position must take responsibility for their own structural advantage and intermediate hegemonic location. Oppression from above is little excuse for oppressing those below. Ideological consistency, steeped in a radical democratic vision, is key to a pedagogy of the oppressor.

The collapsing of the matrix of domination can only come through each socially located group, each layer of the system, dealing positively not just with their own oppression, but with how they oppress the Others whose heads and hearts they stand on in the hierarchy of humanity. Only through this tidal wave of radical love, where those who are oppressed from above find the courage and humility to own their oppressor status that they hold over those situated below and come into communion and solidarity with the relatively oppressed, can true social transformation take place. A pedagogy of the oppressor is based more on the radicalization of networked and ranked group-to-group relations than it is on the theoretically, and thus, politically isolated and isolating models of group self-determination that are currently so prevalent. Models of self-determination may be contingently important for historically oppressed groups, however, groups do not exist within social vacuums, nor do they exist within pure social binaries. By dealing with the fuller complexity of oppression, humankind stands a better chance of achieving Freire's utopian dream of a humanizing world.

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